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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 35th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 15 April 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland)

later: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)
(Vice-Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (continued) (E/CN.4/1999/69-71 and Add.1, 72-74 and 105; E/CN.4/1999/NGO/42, 45, 49, 70 and 77; A/53/311 and 482; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/12)

1. Mr. DU Zhenquan (China) said that poverty was one of the root causes of the violation of the rights of the child, and narrowing the gap between the rich and poor countries and the rich and the poor within countries was a prerequisite for improving the situation of children. There were some problems which caused particular concern and worry, such as the trafficking in and abduction of children, illegal adoptions, child labour, sexual violation and pornography, the protection of children in armed conflicts and the resettlement of refugee children. His Government supported the efforts of the international community in its determination to solve those problems and to take measures at the national and international levels to guarantee the rights of the child.

2. Regional wars and armed conflicts threatened the lives of children, increasing their suffering. The sale of children and their sexual exploitation continued, although repeatedly condemned by the international community, and child pornography was invading the Internet. His delegation supported the activities of the two working groups on draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Discussions had made some progress, but there were differences of opinion due to divergences in legal systems and national practices but, if all States held to the principle of the best interests of the child and made concerted efforts in a pragmatic and constructive manner, the drafting would soon progress.

3. In tackling such hideous acts as the sale of children and their sexual exploitation, it was equally important to deal with market demand and the sources of supply; every effort should also be made, with international assistance and cooperation, to assist the physical and mental recovery of victims and to reintegrate them into society. His Government appealed to the parties to armed conflicts to comply strictly with international humanitarian law, and wished to draw attention to the harm economic sanctions did to the rights and interests of children.

4. The rights of the child needed to be protected and safeguarded by national legislation. China had a comprehensive legal system for the protection of the rights of the child, and had adopted a large number of administrative measures to promote and monitor the healthy development of children, with notable successes in reducing neonatal and infant mortality and improving child nutrition and health.

5. Apart from a nationwide system of nine years' compulsory education, China had its "Project Hope" to help school dropouts resume their education, its "Plan of Spring Buds" to help girl dropouts and its "Dandelion Plan" to enrich the cultural life of children in rural areas. A provisional scheme for the education of migratory children, introduced in 1998, required local administrations to create conditions for migratory children to receive schooling.

6. Mr. TCHOUMAREV (Russian Federation) said that his delegation wished to draw the Commission's attention to the tragic massacre of Albanian refugees in Kosovo, many of them children. His delegation had, on a number of occasions, stated that violations of the Charter of the United Nations and action contrary to the Security Council led to massive violations of the rights and freedoms of individuals, including children. It was quite clear from the tragedy in Kosovo and the bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) - which in his delegation's view must be ended forthwith - that those decisions had been taken at the headquarters of the NATO alliance.

7. As for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, his delegation favoured the soonest possible conclusion of work on the development of an optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. The central element of such a document should be raising the minimum age for the involvement of persons in military action and setting an age-limit for both compulsory and voluntary recruitment into the armed forces. In both cases, the limit should be 18 years of age.

8. Another important sphere of activity for the international community was the protection of children from sexual exploitation. The practical implementation of the very important guidelines contained in the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, including the adoption of legislative and implementation measures at national level, could produce positive results for the protection of children's rights. Similarly, the drafting of a second optional protocol to the Convention, on the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, had made some progress; the process was not an easy one but it had to be pursued to its conclusion. In that connection, his delegation proposed that the name of the protocol be changed from "optional" to "additional" to bring it into line with established international legal practice and to ensure that it more accurately reflected the nature and sense of the document.

9. His Government was seeking effective implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which emphasized the importance of national and international efforts to encourage respect for the rights of the child and confirmed the commitment of the international community to the principle of according priority attention to children.

10. In the 1990s, the Russian Federation had adopted more than 100 standard-setting legal instruments relating to children, including federal laws, presidential decrees and government decisions. The Family Code had brought legislation into line with the basic principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, there were gaps in Russian legislation, notably regarding the legal position of the children of migrants. Further legislative work had to be done on the procedure for adoption, above all at the international level.

11. Since 1993, the Russian Federation had produced annual State reports on the situation of children, which assessed the progress achieved in implementing the rights of the child. Since 1995, monitoring had been undertaken in all the administrative entities of the country regarding the socio-economic situation of families with under-age children. One of the

elements that demonstrated the interest Russian society had in children's problems was the alternative report drawn up by Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the Committee on the Rights of the Child. It was an effective mechanism for implementing the provisions of the Convention. The Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and with the agreement of the administrative entities of the Russian Federation, had embarked on an experimental project to establish institutes for the rights of the child in all regions of the country.

12. In the Russian Federation, as in many other countries, full realization of the rights of the child was hampered by economic difficulties and the weakness of State education and health-care infrastructures. Childhood and the rights of the child were regarded not only as a legal and political matter but also as a question of morality and humanistic cultural values.

13. Ms. TIRONA (Philippines) said that her delegation supported the early adoption of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts as well as that on the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Children should have no part in fighting wars, and the minimum age for recruitment should be 18. The involvement of children in conflicts was not simply a violation of their rights, but a negation of the development of a culture of peace that should begin at birth. It was not surprising that States which had recruited children as combatants were among those that found it particularly difficult to create a situation of enduring peace.

14. Her delegation supported the Commission's efforts to give the highest possible priority to the immediate implementation of the recommendation to provide relief to children in distress. It would require well organized and coordinated efforts involving the entire United Nations system.

15. Her delegation wished to reiterate its concern over the massive number of children with disabilities as a consequence of poverty, disease, disaster and violence, and called on all States and institutions to intensify activities to enhance awareness and overcome discrimination against children with disabilities, and to use holistic approaches in pursuing their welfare.

16. Her Government welcomed the proposed drafting by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of an instrument aimed at eradicating the most intolerable forms of child labour, and also welcomed the inclusion of provisions in the Statute of the International Criminal Court to stop the use of children as soldiers, end impunity and establish individual criminal responsibility.

17. In order to help the Committee on the Rights of the Child handle its increasing workload, she urged the States parties that had not yet done so to accept the proposed amendment to the Convention which would increase its membership from 10 to 18.

18. Mr. PLORUTTI (Argentina) said he welcomed the work being done on the two draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the efforts to prepare an additional protocol to the draft convention against

organized transnational crime concerning trafficking in women and children. His delegation had participated in the work of all three drafting groups, seeking to produce comprehensive definitions that could not be interpreted in such a way as to defeat the objectives of the instruments.

19. Argentina had made an interpretative declaration on ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the effect that such rights began at the moment of conception. The Convention had constitutional status in Argentina and was being applied by the courts. The Attorney-General had instructed all his staff to bear in mind the supremacy of the Convention over any conflicting legislative provisions. Argentina had also ratified the amendment to article 43 of the Convention increasing the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

20. To protect the identity of children, the Argentine legal system imposed aggravated penalties for all offences connected with trafficking in children such as abduction, concealment and suppression of identity. A National Commission on the Right to Identity established in 1992 was responsible for tracing missing and abducted children of unknown identity, children born of mothers who had been unlawfully deprived of their liberty and other children who were unidentified because they had been separated from their biological parents. The Commission had so far established the identity of 62 children born in captivity during the period from 1976 to 1983.

21. Ms. ASTRUP (Norway) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by all but two countries, provided an agenda and served as a tool for improving the situation of children. She was concerned, however, that some States had entered reservations that were contrary to its object and purpose. Withdrawals of such reservations would be particularly welcome as the international community celebrated the Convention's tenth anniversary.

22. The Commission should promote the incorporation of children's rights in a wide range of United Nations activities. The Security Council, following a special briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict in 1998, had identified areas in which it should take children's needs into account, e.g. peace-keeping operations. Accordingly, the mandate for the peace-keeping operation in Sierra Leone made explicit reference to the need for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. Her Government was supporting the Special Representative in the hope that he would serve as the voice of children in war and as a catalyst for action. She appealed to States that had entered into dialogue with him to honour their commitments regarding child soldiers.

23. She welcomed the declaration on child soldiers and the plan of action for a West African moratorium on small arms adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at a meeting in March 1999. Restricting the proliferation of small arms was a key factor in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.

24. Her delegation welcomed the adoption in 1998 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which made it clear that the involvement of children in armed forces was morally unacceptable. The conscription or

enlistment of children under 15 years of age or their active use in hostilities was punishable by the Court as a war crime. She commended the efforts by some States and by the NGO coalition against the use of child soldiers to break the deadlock in the negotiations on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

25. The entry into force on 1 March 1999 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction constituted a major step towards eliminating a threat to the life and health of many children.

26. She welcomed the initial report by the Special Rapporteur on the right to education (E/CN.4/1999/49), which adopted an innovative rights-based approach, and looked forward to the Special Rapporteur's analysis of the results of educational action from a human rights perspective by United Nations organizations and national Governments. She also welcomed the Special Rapporteur's intention to incorporate gender considerations in her reports.

27. Her delegation hoped that the working group on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would complete its work at the forthcoming session. The Special Rapporteur on those issues had played an important role in that connection and her delegation reiterated its support for that work.

28. Her delegation was encouraged by the increased interest in programmes to combat child labour and strongly supported ILO efforts to draft a convention on the worst forms of child labour. She hoped that a strong instrument ensuring a high level of protection of the worst-affected children would be adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 1999.

29. While recent developments in information and communications offered opportunities for enhanced enjoyment of human rights such as freedom of speech and the right to education and information, graphic violence and information inciting to violence and racism had become easily accessible. Her Government intended to respond to the appeal by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to look for ways to protect children from the negative impact of the information revolution.

30. Mr. CASTRO GRANDE (El Salvador), having endorsed the statement by the representative of Guatemala on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that his Government viewed children's rights as a moral and ethical imperative. The Salvadoran Institute for the Protection of Minors was responsible for implementing national policy on children and adolescents and for protecting child victims of violence. The Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Family Code provided the corresponding legal framework. National programmes and projects in the area of children's rights were supplemented by campaigns to promote appropriate adult behaviour towards children. The Legislative Assembly had enacted legislation and established mechanisms to guarantee children's rights and their access to basic services. Investment in health and education had been

increased in recent years. Local NGOs were implementing projects for the rescue and reintegration of street children and the Municipality of San Salvador, in collaboration with private enterprise, was engaged in an ambitious project aimed at rescuing abandoned children.

31. Millions of children throughout the world were working in dangerous and degrading occupations, usually in the informal sector. The root of the problem was extreme poverty and its eradication called for better access to education, a change in family attitudes, and integrated policies designed to improve socio-economic and cultural conditions. The problem was being addressed in El Salvador through legislation prohibiting child labour and the exploitation of minors and programmes such as the ILO International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour.

32. His delegation looked forward to the prompt completion of the task of the working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It welcomed the efforts being made to end the use of children in armed conflicts, particularly the Secretary-General's move to establish a minimum age requirement for participation in United Nations peace-keeping operations. His Government was taking steps to increase the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities through the amendment of national legislation and participation in the proceedings of the working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

33. Mr. Simkhada (Nepal), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

34. Ms. KOWALSKA (Poland) said that the family was the first and main protector of a child's rights, as recognized in the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was in the caring environment of the family that children learned to communicate and to respect human dignity. Parents were thus the child's most important educators. However, many families had forgotten the importance of their role in a rapidly changing social and cultural environment and economic pressures often led to the dissolution of family bonds. Family crises also undermined spiritual values. Contemporary mass culture was fraught with violence and promoted hedonistic and utilitarian attitudes. The State had a special responsibility to provide for the victims of natural or social orphanhood and legal procedures for adoption should be simplified and shortened so that children could begin a new life in surroundings that closely resembled a natural environment.

35. Systematic preventive action was more effective and more economical than remedial action to address crises and pathological social phenomena. Legal standards should aim at consolidating and protecting the family. Under article 18 of the Polish Constitution, marriage, motherhood and parenthood were guaranteed special protection and care.

36. Mr. JAZBI (Pakistan), having expressed his support for the proposal by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children for a plan of action on behalf of the children of Kosovo, said that children throughout the world suffered in armed conflicts as refugees, internally displaced persons and combatants or para-combatants.

Armies of occupation treated them as soft targets, punishing them for their parents' convictions. It was to be hoped that the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts would ameliorate their plight. His delegation would continue to cooperate with the working group in its endeavours to achieve a consensus text.

37. The growth of the Internet had added a dangerous dimension to the exploitation of children as objects of sexual gratification. He thus looked forward to the early adoption of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

38. Poverty was the most pervasive threat to the welfare of children and malnutrition was the leading cause of child deaths in the world. Those who survived were frequently crippled, vulnerable to disease and mentally deficient. Of the 10 million children under five years of age who died each year in the developing countries, 70 per cent succumbed to curable diseases which went untreated because of poverty.

39. If poor children in the developing countries managed to avoid malnutrition, poverty prevented them from enjoying their right to education. Many had to start work at an early age to supplement the family income and were thus poorly equipped to deal with life. The vicious circle of poverty from generation to generation had to be broken.

40. Pakistan had ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO conventions relating to children. The implementation of the Convention was in the hands of the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development, which oversaw all official aspects of a child's life. Recent developments had included the establishment of a special task force on education to coordinate and implement the policy of making primary education free and compulsory throughout the country. To that end, it had been decided to build 107,000 new schools. Health and welfare were to be improved through the Expanded Programme for Immunization, the control of diarrhoeal diseases and the National Nutritional Programme. Aspects of the juvenile justice system would be improved by focusing on rehabilitation, ensuring separate detention facilities, creating a database of children in prison and ensuring access by human rights workers to monitor prison facilities.

41. There was a strong legal framework to prevent the exploitation of children, including the Employment of Children Act 1991, contravention of which was punishable by imprisonment or a fine. Together with other participants in the third South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Conference on Children in South Asia, his Government had adopted 2010 as the target date for the elimination of child labour in the region. Provincial government inspections had resulted in 6,000 prosecutions and nearly 1,400 convictions for the use of child labour. A project was under way in Sialkot, in collaboration with the ILO and UNICEF, to eliminate child labour in the football stitching industry by 2000. Carpet manufacturers had set up six schools in carpet-weaving areas around Lahore, where some 600 working children were being taught the basics of literacy.

42. Desirable as it was to eliminate exploitative child labour, the existence of such labour should not be used as a pretext for protectionist policies. It was therefore imperative that the developed countries should demonstrate their willingness to share the burden of eradicating child labour by providing financial and technical assistance to establish educational and vocational facilities to absorb the children released from the workplace.

43. Mr. HAROUN (Sudan) said that his country had been among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. His Government had established the National Council for Child Care and a national programme for the implementation of the Convention. In collaboration with United Nations specialized agencies, it had published and disseminated the Convention in local languages through the media and training programmes had been organized for media personnel. Basic education, including pre-school education, had been made compulsory. Child Culture Centres, which had significantly contributed to promoting the skills and talents of children, had been set up in various parts of the country.

44. He recalled, however, the miserable conditions of Sudanese children living in areas under rebel control. The rebel movement was exploiting children through forced conscription and using them as human shields. The Government, for its part, had spared no effort to put an end to the war in the southern part of the country: it had concluded the Khartoum Peace Agreement with all the warring factions, bar one rebel movement, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which had refused to accept it. The Government was continuing its efforts to mitigate the suffering of children in war zones. It had declared a comprehensive ceasefire on 5 April, an initiative welcomed by humanitarian organizations.

45. It was regrettable that the United States of America had bombed the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in August 1998. Since that plant had provided 80 per cent of the pharmaceutical goods for both people and animals, its total destruction had resulted in a severe shortage of vitally needed medicines. That act of aggression had deprived his country's children of their right to life and to development.

46. Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), having endorsed the statement by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union, said he hoped that the Convention would be universally ratified and progressively implemented by the end 1999, its tenth anniversary. It was important to monitor implementation and he believed that the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be enlarged: the relevant amendments were currently under consideration by the Czech Parliament.

47. His delegation supported the adoption of the ILO draft convention on the worst forms of child labour, which should include the use of children as soldiers, as provided for in draft article 3. In that context, the inclusion of the use of child soldiers under the age of 15 among the war crimes listed in the Statute of the International Criminal Court was welcome. It was regrettable that the working group on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed

conflicts had been unable to adopt a text and his delegation urged the States blocking the consensus to reconsider their position. Appropriate protection for children required the limit to be 18 years of age.

48. The recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography should be implemented. His Government was currently elaborating the National Plan of Action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, which would focus mainly on prevention but would also strengthen the sanctions imposed on perpetrators.

49. Children's interests were best served by cooperation between the State and the non-governmental sector. For that reason the Government had invited the representatives of civil society to participate in the newly created Section of Children's Rights within the governmental structure of the Commission for Human Rights.

50. Mr. MORENO (Italy), having given full support to the statement by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union, extolled the partnership between his Government and the NGOs, which were engaged together in helping the people fleeing from Kosovo. Through its "rainbow mission", Italy was supporting 4,000 Kosovar children in Albania, in the hope of limiting any post-traumatic stress disorder. His Government was also engaged in promoting an extensive programme of medical care, assistance and rehabilitation for children in refugee camps. The Italian people had donated 45 billion lire, in addition to the sums provided by the Government, for the purpose. Such a vast number of children - orphans, dispersed or simply displaced - was extremely vulnerable to exploitation. The Italian camps recently set up in the region of Kukës, which currently held 3,000 refugees, would shortly be extended to take in 10,000, more than half of whom would be women and children.

51. Mr. SGARBI (Uruguay) said that his Government had undertaken to provide universal free pre-school education for children aged four or five, since it had been found that waiting until they were six made it more difficult to integrate children from the poorer sections of society into the educational system, given the difference in the stimulus they had received in their earliest years. Educational services up to secondary level would be strengthened by the provision of school meals and pilot schemes for full attendance. Progress in health care meant that the infant mortality rate had fallen.

52. His Government had received help and support from UNICEF, national NGOs and the ILO, particularly with regard to the elimination of child labour. In that context, the use of child soldiers constituted one of the worst forms of labour and it was unacceptable that the Convention should have set the limit at 15 years of age rather than at 18. That was why his Government maintained its reservation to article 38, preferring stricter provisions than those contained in the Convention. His delegation hoped that the optional protocol as adopted, would raise the minimum age to 18 in all circumstances.

53. His delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Guatemala on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States regarding the discussions on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on

the Rights of the Child, on the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as the basic measures needed for their prevention and eradication.

54. Mr. HUH Kang-il (Republic of Korea) said that the dire situation of children in armed conflicts called for urgent attention, and his delegation appreciated the efforts made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict to ensure the release, demobilization and disarmament of child soldiers. His Government also hoped that the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts would be completed during the current year, the tenth anniversary of the Convention.

55. A realistic, step-by-step approach should be taken to the problem of the exploitation of child labour. The immediate goal should be to eliminate the most intolerable forms of child labour, with a view to eliminating the phenomenon altogether in the long term. His Government was actively involved in efforts to that end and had recently ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention. The sexual exploitation of children was particularly dismaying, since sexually exploited children ran the risk of premature death or lasting psychological trauma. Rehabilitation programmes were costly and not always successful. He agreed with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that education, the media and the justice system played crucial roles in the elimination of that crime.

56. The thousands of refugee children, many of them unaccompanied, fleeing Kosovo were the group most seriously affected by the crisis there. Urgent international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and reunite families were required, and his Government would continue to participate in such efforts.

57. Given that education had a critical effect on children throughout their lives, children's education should be addressed with a rights-based approach. Strengthening and expanding primary education was an effort that yielded high returns but was contingent on the availability of resources. Governments and the international community as a whole should rearrange their priorities to ensure that primary education was at the forefront of national policies and development programmes. He commended the work being done by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and urged the States parties to the Convention to take steps to bring into force the amendment increasing the Committee's membership from 10 to 18.

58. Mr. HADI (Indonesia) said that children and their rights were given top priority in his country's development policies. Prior to the onset of the economic crisis, Indonesia had made unprecedented progress in the fields of child health and education, significantly reducing infant mortality and increasing school enrolment. The crisis had, however, led to an increase in poverty, forcing many children to leave school and enter the workforce prematurely.

59. To address the adverse effects of the crisis on children, his Government, in cooperation with UNICEF, was implementing both needs-based and rights-based programmes. Needs-based programmes included supplementary

feeding programmes and the provision of financial assistance to prevent children from dropping out of school. In the context of rights-based programmes, the Government had strengthened and expanded the capacity and role of the administrative units involved in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With help from UNICEF, the Ministry of Home Affairs had trained community assistance workers whose activities targeted vulnerable groups such as children and women.

60. In October 1998, the National Commission for the Protection of Children had been established to deal with complaints of violence against children and provide legal aid and counselling. The Commission also examined national legislation to ensure its conformity with the Convention, engaged in information activities relating to children's rights and monitored the implementation of those rights. UNICEF had assisted the Commission by training staff and conducting studies on the problem of violence against children in several provinces of the country.

61. While child labour was an issue of concern, it should be noted that not all work done by children was necessarily harmful to them or their families. In many cases, children benefited from the experience they gained and contributed to their families' welfare. To eliminate such work would be counter-productive. While jobs which prevented children from attending school or subjected them to hazardous conditions were exploitative, prohibiting child labour in developing countries without providing realistic and comprehensive alternatives was ineffective. Indonesia had introduced strict laws setting 14 as the minimum working age, and the Indonesian Parliament was considering ratification of the ILO Minimum Age Convention.

62. Mr. ISSAM (Observer for Iraq) said that the increasing use of economic sanctions against developing countries had had a significant impact on children, the most vulnerable group in society. In her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), the expert appointed by the Secretary-General had called for the ending of such sanctions without obligatory and enforceable humanitarian exemptions and agreed mechanisms for monitoring their impact on children.

63. Since 1990, unprecedented economic sanctions had been imposed on his country which had affected all segments of society, but especially children, who accounted for nearly half of the total population. Neonatal, infant and child mortality rates had all increased significantly with the increase in many infectious diseases. Children also suffered from psychological problems caused by fear and frustration.

64. Like children everywhere, Iraq's children aspired to adequate health care, education and living standards, including the benefits of technological and scientific progress. No one had the authority to violate their right to such aspirations, yet the embargo against Iraq violated all the rights of Iraqi children. He appealed to the Commission to assume its responsibility to protect the rights of Iraqi children and to make serious efforts to bring the devastation wrought by the embargo to an end.

65. Mr. ABDEL MONEIM (Observer for Egypt) said that his delegation fully supported the objectives of the optional protocol to the Convention on the

Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and expressed the hope that the informal consultations on the draft resolution on that subject would be successful.

66. With regard to the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, he said that references to the sale of children should not be restricted to sales for sexual exploitation but should include sale for other forms of abuse. The optional protocol should contain a reference to national legislation as well as to international mechanisms to deal with the problem, as in the case of the draft optional protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. His delegation hoped that those concerns would be addressed in the informal consultations that were currently in progress.

67. Ms. GEELS (Observer for New Zealand), having noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had achieved nearly universal acceptance in only 10 years, said that the real measure of its success, however, lay in its impact on the lives of children, and in many parts of the world children's rights remain largely unrealized. Ensuring the implementation of the Convention must be the international community's priority. UNICEF was to be commended in that connection for having adopted a rights-based approach to its work and having published a handbook on the implementation of the Convention.

68. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, an important resource for the implementation of the Convention, should be fully utilized. Her own country had submitted its initial report to the Committee in 1997, and the Committee had then made 17 recommendations, which her Government was considering while preparing its second periodic report. Making the principles of the Convention a core reference for policy development enhanced a country's compliance with that instrument.

69. Her Government believed that children and young people should be involved in the reporting process and had supported a community initiative that had sought the views of young people on how to communicate with children about the Convention. It would continue to explore with young people ways that they could enhance their involvement in the issues that affected them.

70. The situation of children in armed conflict had far-reaching consequences and New Zealand participated in an initiative in Papua New Guinea for young people who had grown up in such a situation. Her delegation supported the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to raise awareness of the abduction of children to serve as soldiers or sex slaves in armed conflicts. Immediate action was needed to protect such children, and the international community must make it clear that such violations of children's rights were intolerable. Her delegation supported the conclusion of the proposed optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It was also to be hoped that the ILO would commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Convention by adopting a convention to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

71. Mr. CUELLO CAMILO (Observer for the Dominican Republic), having endorsed the statement by the representative of Guatemala on behalf of the Latin

American and Caribbean States, drew attention to the legislation which his country had enacted to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The National Plan of Action developed in response to the World Summit for Children had led to the creation of a number of government bodies, including a National Commission to follow-up the commitments undertaken at the World Summit. The Commission's sectoral activities had been developed with the participation of government agencies and NGOs. The Government had also established a Commission to support the reform and modernization of the justice system, an effort that was focused on special courts for children and adolescents.

72. A governing body for the child welfare system had been established which was responsible for all plans, programmes and activities carried out by government and non-governmental agencies involved in the protection of children's rights. Specific activities included expansion of the school breakfast programme, a relaxing of criteria for school enrolment, a scholarship programme, the signing of an agreement with the ILO for the elimination of child labour and the regulation of adolescent labour, and the development of a national social mobilization programme for children's rights, under which 140 NGOs carried out activities in rural areas.

73. His delegation believed that the best way for the international community to observe the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was to complete work on the various optional protocols currently in preparation.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.